

## Evil in the Subtext: Reading *Eichmann in Jerusalem* as a Critique of Capitalism

Milen Jissoo, BNU-HKBU United International College

Analysing the history of Nazism in his 1939 article, “The Jews and Europe,” the philosopher Max Horkheimer declared: “whoever is not willing to talk about capitalism should also keep quiet about fascism.” Conceiving “Nazism” as a specific variety of “fascism,” he thus tied up the histories of Nazism and capitalism.<sup>1</sup>

Horkheimer was a premier intellectual of the Frankfurt School of social theory – a leading current of Marxist thought in the West in the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Given his Marxism, his association of Nazism with capitalism was not surprising. As a Marxist, moreover, Horkheimer thought that understanding Nazism did not demand the formulation of new theoretical concepts. He believed that Marxism was sufficient for explaining it.<sup>3</sup>

Horkheimer’s views on understanding Nazism clashed with those of its best-known theorist – Hannah Arendt. In her *magnum opus*, the 1951 *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt argued that the twentieth century saw the rise of a historically new form of political organisation. This “novel form of government” was what she famously termed “totalitarianism.”<sup>4</sup> She claimed that it appeared in two forms – the regimes of Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union and Adolf Hitler in Germany. Arendt thus proposed that totalitarianism was an unprecedented historical phenomenon. And, unlike Horkheimer, she thought that it defied all accepted categories of historical and social-scientific explanation. For her, understanding it required new theoretical concepts and methods of historical and social-scientific analysis.<sup>5</sup>

In Arendt’s view, Marxism could not explain totalitarianism. In *Origins*, she argued that Nazism and Stalinism were ideological regimes. Each was based on an ideology – racism and Marxism, respectively – in which it believed fanatically, and in whose name it perpetrated mass murder.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Arendt implicated Marxism in the history of totalitarianism. For her, employing it to understand totalitarianism would, hence, be absurd. It would be attempting to make totalitarianism understand itself.

Contra her indictment of Marxism, this essay elucidates a strange convergence of Arendt’s and Horkheimer’s thinking on Nazism. It transpires – surprisingly – in a book of Arendt that, on its surface, is utterly unrelated to Marxism. The book is the famous – and notorious – *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*.

Published in 1963, last year *Eichmann* turned fifty. It is Arendt's most controversial work. Written as a "report" on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi bureaucrat chiefly responsible for organising the deportations of the Jews of Europe to the Nazi concentration camps during the Final Solution, it argued that the accused was not a monster driven by genocidal motives, but very much a "normal" person, one, in fact, all too similar to many other Germans under Hitler's regime. His most striking trait, moreover, was something different from inhuman cruelty: it was a peculiar "inability to think" from the perspective of another human being.<sup>7</sup>

*Eichmann's* publication sparked intense controversies, some of which continue even today.<sup>8</sup> Scholars have, thus, questioned Arendt's idiosyncratic stylisation of the Nazi bureaucrat. They have critiqued and endeavoured to rethink what, as we shall see, constituted *Eichmann's* main argument – Arendt's conception of "the banality of evil."<sup>9</sup> Critics of Arendt have, also, argued that she seriously misunderstood Eichmann and his crimes. They have claimed that, as a main perpetrator of the Holocaust, Eichmann *was* a monstrous mass murderer, motivated by a genocidal anti-Semitism.<sup>10</sup>

Scrutinising *Eichmann*, this essay also proposes that Arendt misunderstood Eichmann. But I depart from the claim of previous critiques that she missed the monster's monstrosity. I argue that, unexpectedly, the book subverts its own central argument by formulating an analysis that Arendt never meant to make. Surprisingly, the work articulates an unintended subtext. This narrative shows that Eichmann's defining characteristic was not what Arendt saw as his defective thinking. It was, strikingly, his being bourgeois. Moreover, the book's strange subtext suggests that what turned Eichmann into a chief perpetrator of the Holocaust was neither wickedness, nor a flawed mind. It was, astonishingly, precisely his being bourgeois. *Eichmann*, thus, exhibits a hitherto unrecognised Marxist dimension – a Marxist subtextual narrative that, implicitly and unbeknownst to the author, represents Eichmann as bourgeois, and implicates that mode of being in his crimes. This subtext thereby transforms the book into an inadvertent critique of capitalism.

This essay is an analytical experiment. It focuses on *Eichmann*, and develops a close and critical reading of the work. It does not claim, in general, that Eichmann's being bourgeois was what transformed him into a chief perpetrator of the Holocaust. Rather, I argue that, unwittingly and subtextually, Arendt's book *portrays* Eichmann as being bourgeois and *implicates* his being bourgeois in his genocidal crimes. In this sense, *Eichmann* constitutes an inadvertent and implicit Marxist critique of capitalism.<sup>11</sup> The essay proposes that Arendt's book can be interpreted as such a critique and explores how it can be read so. Thus, it is an experimental exercise of rethinking *Eichmann*.

As such, the essay critiques Arendt. But, in doing so, it embraces faithfully the spirit of her thinking. In an essay on Martin Heidegger that celebrated thinking, Arendt declared: "Every thinker, if only he grows old enough, must strive to unravel what have actually emerged as the results of his thought, and he does this simply by rethinking them."<sup>12</sup> These words constitute a clarion affirmation of critical self-reflection – of critical rethinking of one's thinking. This essay tries to rethink Arendt's thinking on Eichmann.

### ***Eichmann's* Ostensible Main Argument**

*Eichmann's* ostensible main argument was thoroughly non-Marxist. It was journalistic and "factual."<sup>13</sup> In her correspondence, Arendt described the book as follows: "there are no 'ideas' in this Report, there are *only facts* with a few conclusions, and these conclusions usually appear at the end of each chapter. The only exception to this is the *Epilog*, which is a discussion of the legal aspect of the case [italics mine]."<sup>14</sup> In *Eichmann's* "Postscript," Arendt similarly said: "this book contains a *trial report*" [italics in original.] Arendt thus took seriously the word "report" in the subtitle of her work. She was convinced that the book was, indeed, a "report" on Eichmann's trial. The central object of its reportage was, hence, the trial's accused. Focusing on and scrutinising him, Arendt reported that his defining characteristic was his incapacity to think from the perspective of another individual.<sup>15</sup>

But while seeking factuality, Arendt's report turned idiosyncratic. It veered away from a rigorous reportage on Eichmann's trial, and towards the Nazi's mental peculiarities. In fact, the relationship between the workings of Eichmann's mind and his involvement in the Holocaust became one of its key themes. *Eichmann's* main, apparent argument centres on what Arendt termed "the banality of evil." Appearing in its subtitle, this phrase assumes an enormous significance in the book. *Eichmann* is, indeed, a report not on the Eichmann trial, but on "the banality of evil." The meaning of the phrase constitutes its central, ostensible argument.

"The banality of evil," as Arendt explained, did not designate a philosophical concept, but a "factual ... phenomenon which stared one in the face at [Eichmann's] trial." The "factual phenomenon" consisted of the blatant fact that the Nazi bureaucrat was not an "abnormal monster" driven by excessively evil motives, but very much a "normal" person. "Eichmann was not Iago and not Macbeth," wrote Arendt, "and nothing would have been farther from his mind than to determine with Richard III 'to prove a villain.'" The "factual phenomenon" included, also, the fact that Eichmann's defining characteristic was, as we noted, what Arendt called his "sheer thoughtlessness," his "almost total" "inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else." This mental

debility, Arendt proposed, “predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of [the Nazi] period.” It prevented him from grasping the implications of his actions and from realising “that he [was] doing wrong.” In this way, Eichmann’s monoperspectival thinking contributed to his becoming a perpetrator of genocide. All of these ideas on Eichmann, his trial, and his involvement in the Holocaust constitute Arendt’s understanding of “the banality of evil.”<sup>16</sup> And, they form the main, ostensible argument of her book.<sup>17</sup>

### The Cunning Subtext

*Eichmann* thus interpreted Eichmann’s crimes as a function of a defective mind. But while connecting his thinking to genocide, Arendt’s analysis of the Nazi subtly slips away from her. Cunningly, it takes a life of its own, and, behind her back, articulates its own interpretation of Eichmann. This inadvertent subtext diverges radically from the main, ostensible argument of Arendt’s book. It weaves itself as a subliminal narrative that comes to compete with that argument.<sup>18</sup>

Focused as it is on him, *Eichmann* contains a biography of Eichmann. It is spread throughout the book, and examines his life, crimes, and trial. *Eichmann*’s cunning subtext emerges palpably in this biography. On it, Eichmann’s activities during the Nazi era were motivated to a great extent by a powerful drive to succeed. This momentous drive assumed three forms: a faith in success as the ultimate ideal of life, an ardent ambition, and a vigorous careerism. In its three varieties, his forceful drive to success dominated and defined Eichmann’s Nazi life.

As *Eichmann*’s biography portrayed it, Eichmann’s socio-economic background was respectable. His own social status, though, was mediocre. “In court,” reported Arendt, “Eichmann gave the impression of a typical member of the lower middle classes . . . . But this was misleading; he was rather the *déclassé* son of a solid middle-class family.” Eichmann’s father had been a stereotypical bourgeois: he had worked successively as an accountant, a company official, and an entrepreneur. His son, in contrast, was socially inferior to him. Intellectually, Eichmann was a mediocrity; professionally, he was a disappointment. At school, he was a bad student and never completed his secondary education. Without much schooling, he afterwards tried his hand at work. He held a few humble occupations, first as a labourer and then, in succession, in two positions as a salesman for two Austrian companies. In 1933, he lost the last of these jobs. By that time, he had, in terms of career and socio-economic status, become “a failure.” The previous year, however, he had enrolled in the Nazi party and the SS. After his last layoff in 1933, he embarked on his “career” in the Third Reich.<sup>19</sup>

But while dropping out of the middle class, Eichmann remained bourgeois in his socio-economic ideals. As a bureaucrat of the Holocaust, he routine-

ly met and negotiated with representatives of Jewish communities and interests. In these dealings, he did not always comport himself as a ruthless Nazi; frequently, he showed civility. These good manners had a peculiar root. "The politeness he often showed to [such] functionaries," explained Arendt, "was to a large extent the result of his recognition that he was dealing with people who were socially his superiors." Thus, disregarding the dicta of Nazi ideology that denied Jews humanity, Eichmann treated courteously Jewish leaders that he dealt with because of their social eminence. More generally, respectable, bourgeois society occupied a special place in his heart and mind. He placed it on a pedestal of esteem. It inspired in him an intense and deep admiration. At all times, he was "overawed by 'good society.'"<sup>20</sup>

Its bewitchment of Eichmann linked bourgeois society to the genocide that he organised. Arendt, however, proposed that that society's complicity in the Holocaust surpassed its hypnotism on the bureaucrat. She argued that it was implicated strongly in the crimes of Nazism. "The whole of [German] respectable society," she declared, "... in one way or another succumbed to Hitler." Indeed, the entire European bourgeoisie also surrendered to Nazism. The regime "caused" a "total[...] ... moral collapse" "in respectable European society – not only in Germany but in almost all countries." Analysing the workings of Eichmann's conscience during the Nazi era, Arendt wrote:

His conscience was ... set at rest when he saw the zeal and eagerness with which "good society" everywhere reacted as he did [i.e., it accepted and supported Hitler's regime]. He did not need to "close his ears to the voice of conscience," as the judgment [of his trial] has it, not because he had none, but because his conscience spoke with ... the voice of respectable society around him.<sup>21</sup>

Aristotle believed that a society's middle class is the custodian of morality and prudence in its politics.<sup>22</sup> In *Eichmann*, Arendt claimed that German – and European – "respectable society" during the Nazi regime made a mockery of Aristotle's classic praise of the middle class. She contended that the German and European bourgeoisie largely embraced Hitler's rule. It thus demoralised itself deeply: it adopted Nazism's political ideas and moral values, which included anti-Semitism and murder. More concretely, the society of that bourgeoisie corrupted Eichmann morally. By pacifying his conscience, it encouraged his perpetration of genocide.<sup>23</sup>

Analysing the history of totalitarianism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt made a tremendously important statement on the bourgeoisie of modern Europe. Its "way and philosophy of life," she observed, was "insistently and exclusively centered on the individual's success or failure in ruthless competition."<sup>24</sup> This historical dictum is momentous. It shows that, in her understanding

of modern European history, Arendt conceived “success” as the supreme ideal of Europe’s bourgeoisie and bourgeois society.

In *Eichmann*, Arendt proposed that Eichmann too embraced “success” as his own highest ideal. “What he fervently believed in up to the end,” she wrote, “was success, the chief standard of ‘good society’ as he knew it.”<sup>25</sup> In this way, Arendt represented Eichmann as a passionate adherent to the supreme standard of individual excellence and worth of Europe’s bourgeoisie. She depicted him as being intensely bourgeois in heart and mind.

The bourgeois focus on success was a vital source of what was the central allegiance in Eichmann’s life – his loyalty to his *Führer*. The Adolf in the dock in Jerusalem cherished for the Adolf at the helm of the Nazi Reich a “boundless and immoderate admiration.” And that veneration had a special mainspring. Eichmann himself expressed his awe as follows at his trial:

Hitler ... “may have been wrong all down the line, but one thing is beyond dispute: the man was able to work his way up from lance corporal in the German Army to Führer of a people of almost eighty million. ... His success alone proved to me that I should subordinate myself to this man.”

In Eichmann, Hitler inspired reverence as a self-made man, as an embodiment of individual achievement. Eichmann worshipped his Führer because, to him, Hitler was an incarnation of success – the supreme ideal of European bourgeois society. And that society itself “reacted [to Hitler] as [Eichmann] did.” A main reason why it embraced Nazism, Arendt argued, was precisely Hitler’s “success” – his rise from a lowly everyman to Germany’s master. German and European respectable society was enthralled by this ascent. It too, like Eichmann, embraced Hitler and subjected itself to him.<sup>26</sup>

For Arendt, then, modern Europe’s bourgeoisie had one singular and supreme ideal – individual success. A *déclassé* from it, Eichmann made its top-most ideal his own highest creed. Its admiration of success drew Europe’s bourgeoisie towards Nazism. Admiring what it saw as Hitler’s triumphal ascent to the summits of political power, it lined up behind him and offered him a devoted support. Enthralled by success, Eichmann likewise subjected himself to the individual whom he saw as the incarnation of success. He enthralled himself to Hitler, transforming himself into a devoted executor of his Führer’s rule. This crucial transformation of Eichmann into a militant agent of Nazism was motivated by a force that was thoroughly “bourgeois” in character – faith in success as the loftiest ideal in life.

Converting him into a dedicated agent of Nazism, Eichmann’s drive to success also defined three key moments in his Nazi life. The first one appeared before Hitler’s seizure of power. In April 1932, Eichmann enlisted in the SS. This was the organisation in which he eventually became the principal bureaucrat of genocide during Hitler’s regime. His enlistment was, thus, a momentous

event: it constituted the beginning of his “career” as a chief perpetrator of the Holocaust. At his trial, the issue of his motivation in joining the SS was brought up, and he had to explain it. He purported that his decision had been an unremarkable occurrence. A friend of his “had said to him: Why not join the S.S.? And he had replied, Why not? That was how it had happened, and that was about all there was to it.” But Arendt was not taken in by this story. “What Eichmann failed to tell the presiding judge in cross-examination,” she wrote,

was that he had been an *ambitious* young man who was fed up with his job as ... [a] salesman ... . From a humdrum life without significance and consequence the wind had blown him into History, as he understood it, namely, into a Movement [the Nazi movement] ... in which somebody like him – already a failure in the eyes of his social class, of his family, and hence in his own eyes as well – could start from scratch and still make a career [*italics mine*].

Not indifference and the casual prompting of a friend, then, but *ambition* was the reason for Eichmann’s entry into the SS. That organisation offered the prospect of an advantageous career; his ambition – his powerful drive to success – forced him to seize it. The bourgeois drive to success was, thus, what compelled Eichmann to join the SS. It was the motive for perhaps the most fateful choice of his life.<sup>27</sup>

The second occasion when his drive to success overwhelmed Eichmann’s Nazi life came about six years later. Like his entry into the SS, this too was a key moment in his Nazi “career.” The year was 1938, and Hitler’s Reich had just annexed Austria. In March, Eichmann was sent to Vienna, where he was put in charge of the Centre for Emigration of Austrian Jews. His assignment was to organise the “expulsion” of “all Jews” from Austria. Eichmann’s Vienna mission “was his first important job, his whole career ... was in the balance.” He did not disappoint his superiors. “His success,” wrote Arendt, “was spectacular: ... in less than eighteen months, Austria was ‘cleansed’ of close to a hundred and fifty thousand people, roughly sixty per cent of its Jewish population.” And what brought about the “stellar” completion of Eichmann’s assignment? It was his frenetic dedication to it. Aware of its importance for his “career,” Arendt argued, “he must have been frantic to make good.” Arendt did not provide evidence to demonstrate Eichmann’s careerist zeal. But her hypothesis is clear: what gave rise to Eichmann’s egregious “success” was his vigorous careerism – his intense application to his assigned duties – to his job, to his “career.”<sup>28</sup>

Eichmann’s “work” in Vienna “marked the real beginning of his career.” It established him as a leading “expert on ‘the Jewish question,’” and “as an ‘authority’ on ... [expulsion], as the ‘master’ who knew how to make people move.” Armed with such a reputation, he quickly rose in the ranks of the SS.



When he went to Vienna in the spring of 1938, he had the rank of a lieutenant; in the autumn of 1941, he was promoted to lieutenant colonel. Shortly before that promotion, he was appointed chief of Subsection IV-B-4 of the Head Office for Reich Security, one of the main branches of the SS. That subsection was the SS department that organised the deportations of the Jews of Europe to the Nazi concentration and death camps during the Final Solution. His rule of it was what made Eichmann one of the main perpetrators of the Holocaust. And what, again, unleashed his hectic climb to the lieutenant-colonelcy and to the headship of IV-B-4 was his dedicated, careerist application to his duties in Vienna.<sup>29</sup>

A similar dedication transpired towards the end of Eichmann's Nazi "career." The year was 1944, and the context was east of the Austrian capital-in-Hungary. That country became the scene of one of the most tragic chapters in the history of the Holocaust. Assisted by a strong home-grown anti-Semitism, and by the Hungarian authorities, the Nazis wrought an extreme genocide. "Nowhere else," Arendt explained, "were so many people deported and exterminated in such a brief span of time."<sup>30</sup>

Eichmann was the chief executor of the Holocaust in Hungary. But he did not have sole command of it. He was a part of a crew that was charged with its execution. And these agents of genocide did not always work in harmony. Eichmann was, in fact, exasperated by one of them – a Kurt Becher, who was sent over by Heinrich Himmler, the commander-in-chief of the Final Solution. In Eichmann's eyes, Becher was a pest. He had a task that seemed to interfere with Eichmann's own. And what was it? It was a "business" assignment: Becher had to arrange the seizure of all Jewish economic assets. In Becher's eyes, Eichmann was the nuisance. "The one thing that stood in his way," wrote Arendt, "was the narrow-mindedness of ... creatures like Eichmann, *who took their jobs seriously* [italics mine]." In Hungary, Eichmann thus showed his characteristic rigid dedication to his job. He was once again the keen executive of mass murder – the devoted careerist striving after professional "success."<sup>31</sup>

In Hungary, Eichmann's careerism appeared also in another way. Taking place in 1944, the Hungarian Holocaust was strongly influenced by the progress of the Second World War. At that time, it was becoming clear that Germany was losing the War. One of those overcome by the prospect was Himmler. As disaster loomed more and more likely, he also realised that, if defeat did come about, the Holocaust would be extremely damning to the Nazi leadership. Accordingly, he *restrained* the Third Reich's assault on European Jewry. Until now, ideology – the Nazis' annihilationist anti-Semitism – had dominated the implementation of the Final Solution. But, in Hungary, other motives cropped up and even came to compete with the ideology. Chief among them were economic ones. The presence of Becher in Budapest, who was in fact given great authority and



encroached on Eichmann's, was one indication of this shift. Another one was corruption. It was rife in Hungary, as Jewish leaders tried to bribe their Nazi executioners in a desperate attempt to save from death as many people as possible. A third motive came from Himmler himself. He now conceived a proposal to barter one million Jewish people for ten thousand trucks from the Allies, to be used in Germany's war effort. He even started negotiations on the deal with Jewish functionaries in Hungary. The previous, ideologically motivated attack on European Jewry de-escalated. What now followed was a messier state of affairs, in which the Nazis started loosening their fanatical anti-Semitism, and replacing it with utilitarian drives.<sup>32</sup>

Eichmann was disappointed by these changes. On a mundane level, he hated the intrusions into his authority of someone like Becher. More importantly, he was a dedicated bureaucrat of genocide, who had devoted his entire professional career as an SS officer to executing the anti-Semitic ideology of Hitler's regime. The de-escalation of the Holocaust thus disillusioned him. But despite his misgivings, he joined in the new tide. In Hungary, he became involved in the negotiations on Himmler's proposal to spare Jews in exchange for trucks. For him, this was a serious about-face. He had compromised his "uncompromising" professional SS service in genocide, and was now engaging in mercantile transactions. And what was the reason for his metamorphosis? "The way he," wrote Arendt,

explained his role in this matter, in Jerusalem, showed clearly how he had once justified it to himself: as a military necessity that would bring him the additional benefit of an important new role in the ... business [of expulsion of Jews]. What he probably never admitted to himself was that the ... [new, messier state of affairs] made it every day more likely that he would soon be without a job ... unless he succeeded in finding some foothold ... [in the changed situation].

On Arendt's analysis, the new confusion in the Final Solution undermined Eichmann's position, made it precarious, and he faced the prospect of becoming dispensable. At this critical moment, his concern for his job took over. It compelled him to depart from his duties as an administrator of mass murder, and to become involved in the dealings on Himmler's barter initiative. It overwhelmed him and transformed him, once again, into a single-minded careerist.<sup>33</sup>

Analysing the history of Nazism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt argued that most of the regime's loyal supporters were what she called "mass men" – atomised individuals made desperate by the economic and political cataclysms in Europe during the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. Tapping their desperation, Nazism recruited and made these people

devoted followers. Some of them were transformed into fanatical henchmen and used for the perpetration of crimes.<sup>34</sup>

In this analysis of Nazi popular support, Arendt made a very significant assessment of the mindset of the Nazi faithful. These individuals, she argued momentarily, cherished a “single-minded devotion to matters of family and *career* [italics mine].” “The mass man,” she wrote,

whom Himmler organized for the greatest mass crimes ever committed in history ... was the *bourgeois* who in the midst of the ruins of his world worried about nothing so much as his private security, was ready to sacrifice everything – belief, honor, dignity – on the slightest provocation. Nothing proved easier to destroy than the ... private morality of people who thought of nothing but safeguarding their private lives [italics mine].<sup>35</sup>

In Arendt’s understanding of Nazism, the dedicated, murderous Nazi follower was a desperate bourgeois intensely focused on his “career.”<sup>36</sup> In its analysis of his activities in Hungary, *Eichmann* also represented Eichmann in this way. Arendt described him as obsessed with his murderous job. She portrayed him as a genocidal bourgeois careerist.

After his careerism pushed him into sinister “business” deals, Eichmann rededicated himself single-mindedly to the deportation of the Jews of Hungary to the concentration camps. But his return to his old ways set him against Himmler. Starting in the spring of 1944, the latter, as we saw, slowed the Holocaust down. Going against the directives of Hitler, he tried from now on to hold back the genocide of Europe’s Jews – in an effort to put himself in a good position vis-à-vis the Allies, after Germany’s likely military defeat. In the course of this restraint, Eichmann grew opposed to him. Thus, in the autumn of 1944, Himmler officially halted the deportation of Hungary’s Jews. But, “when [his] order to stop the evacuation of Hungarian Jews arrived in Budapest, Eichmann threatened ... ‘to seek a new decision from the Führer.’”<sup>37</sup>

According to Arendt, the main reason for Eichmann’s opposition to Himmler’s new policy was his awareness that it ran against the directives of Hitler – which ordered the total annihilation of European Jewry. And that opposition showed a peculiar psycho-intellectual dynamic. It was motivated by what, above all, bound Eichmann to his Führer: his bourgeois admiration for Hitler, the self-made success. A “personal element,” argued Arendt, was “undoubtedly involved” in Eichmann’s dedication, contra Himmler, to the continuation of genocide. That force “was his genuine, ‘boundless and immoderate admiration for Hitler’ ... – for the man who had made it ‘from lance corporal to Chancellor of the Reich.’” On Arendt’s own analysis, his reverence for Hitler, the incarnation of success, was, thus, a strong stimulus for Eichmann’s fanatical commitment to the Holocaust in Hungary.<sup>38</sup>

Arendt's biography of Eichmann, thus, bourgeoisified him. On it, he was a dropout from the bourgeoisie, who, throughout his life, revered that class and its "respectable" society. He was enthralled by the bourgeoisie's most sublime ideal – success. His thralldom to it compelled him to prostrate himself before Hitler, who was to him its incarnation, and to become his zealous follower. In the forms of an ardent ambition and a single-minded careerism, Eichmann's drive to success became a dominant motive of his Nazi life. Ambition motivated his life-changing enlistment in the SS. Careerism produced his ruthless deeds in Vienna, which launched his Nazi "career," propelling him on a rapid rise in the ranks of the SS. That same careerism also guided Eichmann's activities in Hungary. There, it compelled him to apply himself dedicatedly to his genocidal duties, and to take part in macabre mercantile deals, in order to save his job. In Hungary, his servitude to success, in the form of his loyalty to Hitler-*cum*-success, also forced him to continue the Final Solution. In all these ways, *Eichmann* represented Eichmann as being bourgeois.

On that representation, moreover, his being bourgeois implicated Eichmann in the crimes of Nazism. It drove him towards perpetrating genocide. His worship of the bourgeois ideal of success converted Eichmann into a fanatical follower of him whom he saw as the ideal's incarnation – Hitler. In the form of ambition, his bourgeois drive to success induced Eichmann to enlist in the SS. As careerism, it fueled his brutal "exploits" in Vienna. In Hungary, that careerism dedicated him single-mindedly to the completion of his assigned duties – the deportation of the country's Jews to the Nazi concentration camps. Also there, his bourgeois devotion to Hitler, the self-made success, compelled him to oppose Himmler and to persist in implementing the Final Solution. All these ways of being bourgeois thus turned Eichmann into an executor of mass murder. They transformed him into one of the chief perpetrators of the Holocaust.

The portrayal of Eichmann as being bourgeois appears not only in Arendt's biography of him, but also in her book's very focus – its analysis of his mind. *Eichmann's* main ostensible argument, as we saw, was that that mind showed a fateful aberration – a monoperspectivism – that transformed Eichmann into a chief perpetrator of the Holocaust. But Arendt's representation of the Nazi bureaucrat showed that this disorder was not his only mental defect. Also aberrant was his memory. Arendt thought that it worked in weird ways. It was deeply "faulty" – punctured by severe lapses and gaps of oblivion. It also "jump[ed] with great ease over the years" and "was ... not controlled by chronological order." "It was like a storehouse," Arendt asserted, "filled with human-interest stories of the worst type."<sup>39</sup>

In Jerusalem, his mnemonic defects incriminated Eichmann. Thus, during his trial, he averred that, in the 1930s, the ideas on "the Jewish question" of the Nazis and of the Zionist movement coincided: both called for Jewish emi-

gration from Europe. Ergo, in his warped thinking, he was working, as an SS bureaucrat, together with Jewish leaders, to devise “a mutually acceptable” resolution to a common concern. Eichmann went even further. In the late 1930s, before the beginning of the Final Solution, he was the SS officer in charge of organising the expulsion of Jews from the Nazi-dominated territories of Europe. At his trial, he declared that, by directing that expulsion, he “ha[d] saved hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives.” Arendt called this “claim” “preposterous.” Nevertheless, she pointed out that, while in command of the expulsion of the Jews of Austria in 1938-1939, Eichmann had, in fact, negotiated in Vienna – in a sense, worked together with – Jewish emissaries from Palestine, who had come to seek Jewish recruits for settlement there. Eichmann’s memory, however, failed him. He could not remember those envoys. Conceivably, Arendt suggested, the emissaries could have supported his bizarre arguments that he had worked in partnership with Jewish leaders on a common project, and that, if he had not saved, he had helped Jewish people. “There were certain Jews in Vienna whom [Eichmann] recalled very vividly,” Arendt wrote, “... but they were not those Palestinian emissaries, who might have backed up his story.”<sup>40</sup>

But while incriminatingly defective, Eichmann’s memory was not a total wreck. There was a way in which it worked: it “functioned only in respect to things that had had a direct bearing upon his career.” Eichmann, for example, recalled visiting Slovakia in 1942, and receiving the great “honor” of being hosted by its Minister of the Interior, “who [also] invited [his guest] to bowl with him.” But, Eichmann genuinely could not remember that he had an official SS assignment for his trip: to discuss the deportation of Slovakian Jews to the Nazi concentration camps. To him, hobnobbing with Slovakia’s Minister appeared to be an enormous “honor.” His rank in the Nazi hierarchy was not sufficiently high for such an event to be a matter of course: “it was unusual for him to receive social invitations from members of governments.” Eichmann remembered consorting with the Minister because it signified an ascent in the Nazi regime on his part – high enough to merit ministerial social invitations. His memory retained that illustrious moment, and expunged his bureaucratic mission. It was, thus, a “career”-centred power of his mind – a mental mechanism that recorded information related to his Nazi “career” – in this case, his “success” in it – and erased other data. But what his memory’s “career”-focused operation shows is that Eichmann’s careerism had penetrated his mind and corrupted it. Like a virus, it had infected his memory and debilitated it.<sup>41</sup>

Arendt’s depiction of his memory shows that – as careerism – Eichmann’s drive to success dominated him thoroughly. It determined the way his mind worked. Thus, Arendt did not represent Eichmann only as being bourgeois in his life and “work.” On her “report,” his being bourgeois controlled – deformed – his very mind.

Eichmann's being bourgeois afflicted his mind in a further way. It did so during his interrogation before his trial. Analysing its transcript, Arendt found in the interrogation a strange – but deeply significant – moment.<sup>42</sup> The interrogation was carried out by Captain Avner Less, a German-Jewish police officer. Arendt noticed that, in it, Eichmann “explain[ed] to [Less] at considerable length, and repeatedly, [that] he had been unable to attain a higher grade in the S.S., [and] that this was not his fault.” He recurrently told his interrogator that “he had done everything” to reach a higher SS rank but had failed to do so. In this explanation, Arendt observed, Eichmann sought understanding – “sympathy” – from Less – for his failure to rise higher than he did in the SS. He was looking for “‘normal, human’ sympathy for a hard-luck story.”<sup>43</sup>

Arendt found Eichmann's story deeply strange. She saw as weird the fact that he, a person charged with a crime, indeed, the historically unprecedented one of the Holocaust, was looking for understanding, from the detective investigating his deeds, for his failure to rise higher in the ranks of the organisation that had committed the crime. But, for Arendt, what was especially bizarre was that he sought understanding from the “German Jew” Less – a member of the ethnic group that he had endeavoured to destroy. Eichmann was seeking sympathy from an individual whom his deeds had victimised – mortally. For Arendt, this was absurd.<sup>44</sup>

Arendt explained Eichmann's absurdity through *Eichmann's* main argument. She perceived it as a prime example of what she claimed was the Nazi's defining characteristic – his “inability” “to think from the standpoint of somebody else.” “It was precisely this lack of imagination,” she asserted,

which enabled him to sit for months on end facing a German Jew who was conducting the police interrogation, pouring out his heart to the man and explaining again and again how it was that he reached only the rank of lieutenant colonel in the S.S. and that it had not been his fault that he was not promoted.

Arendt theorised that his incapacity to think from another's perspective prevented Eichmann from seeing himself in the way in which most people around him, including, presumably, Less, and certainly Arendt, saw him – as an individual charged with an unprecedented crime, who did not deserve and could not possibly obtain sympathy, *from one of his intended victims*, for not climbing higher than he did in the chain of command of the organisation that had perpetrated the crime. By thus barring his mental vision, the defect in his thinking permitted Eichmann to verbalise recurrently, without compunction, his story of failure – thereby performing an act of absurdity.<sup>45</sup>

Arendt thus claimed that Eichmann's absurd conduct during his police interrogation was brought about by his monoperspectival thinking. But, surprisingly, she showed – without herself seeing it clearly – that there were, in fact, two impulses that motivated Eichmann's outpourings to Less.<sup>46</sup>

In his recurrent story to the detective, as Arendt described it, Eichmann was hoping to “find” “sympathy.” Thus, his account was motivated, on Arendt's own analysis of it, by a plain desire for sympathy.<sup>47</sup> But, as a whole, Arendt's representation of Eichmann in her book indicates that a longing for sympathy was not the decisive motive that gave rise to his outpourings to Less. Apart from the description of his interrogation, the Eichmann that emerges from *Eichmann* is not an individual who ever needed or desired sympathy from other people. Arendt consistently depicts him as a self-sufficient man, who never wished for, or sought, understanding from others. Hence, a desire for sympathy probably played a weak role in Eichmann's soul-baring to his interrogator.

But there was another, far more powerful, motive for that soul-baring. It is, simply, Eichmann's careerism. What gave rise to his absurd story was not so much a search for sympathy; and it was not an “inability” “to think from the standpoint of somebody else.” It was his single-minded focus on his “career.” Arendt's account of his interrogation shows that, years after the end of the Nazi regime, years after the entire world had condemned that rule as a criminal one, and under investigation for his participation in its egregious crimes, Eichmann was still concerned about his “career” success in that regime. In Arendt's examination of his interrogation, Eichmann, thus, emerges not as an individual incapable of seeing himself from the perspective of another, but as one who saw only his “career.” His “career” appears as his sole and exclusive concern. This overriding, zealous concern was what *literally* motivated his recurrent account of disappointment in his SS “career.” It was that story's decisive motive. Indeed, that story, as Arendt represented it, reveals Eichmann's careerism as a motive of a maniacal order. It was a monomania that drove him to disregard totally his current circumstances. It blinded his mind, and compelled him to verbalise his disappointment in his “career” to his Jewish interrogator.<sup>48</sup>

Arendt fails to see that. She claims that what gave rise to Eichmann's absurd story was his monoperspectival thinking. But she shows, unwittingly, that a monomaniacal careerism was the motive that forced Eichmann to perform his act of absurdity. She describes how the Nazi bureaucrat recounted his disappointment in his SS “career,” how his story of a “career” letdown was drastically improper in his interrogation by a Jewish detective. And yet, she does not see that his *careerism* is the chief motive for Eichmann's story – and hence the chief motive for the radical incongruity – his absurdity – between his behaviour and its context. Her perception failing in this way, Arendt deploys her conception of his thinking to explain Eichmann's bizarre behaviour. But, privileging that con-

ception, this explanatory strategy obstructs her vision and prevents her from seeing what her own account of Eichmann's absurdity shows as its main motive – his careerism. It thus leads her to perform an analytical absurdity.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, *Eichmann's* depiction of his mind too bourgeoisified Eichmann. On it, his being bourgeois determined – deformed – the operation of his mind. As careerism, his drive to success controlled – and corrupted – the workings of his memory; it also blinded him to the context of his police interrogation – compelling him to behave absurdly. Yet, strangely, Arendt did not perceive in his mind the Nazi bureaucrat's being bourgeois. This misperception appeared in and damaged her rendition of his interrogation. There, she observed what she thought was an absurdity in the Nazi's conduct. But herself performing an absurdity, she attributed that behaviour to his monoperspectival thinking. She did not realise that its motive was the bureaucrat's drive to success – which eclipsed his mind and forced him to behave weirdly. Arendt failed to see that the source of Eichmann's absurdity was his being bourgeois.

Eichmann's being bourgeois and Arendt's failure to understand it adequately transpired, finally, in *Eichmann's* analysis of “the banality of evil.” In doing so, they precluded the achievement of the book's central objectives – thwarting its understanding of Eichmann and his trial.

The trial, as Arendt noted, was an event of great significance. It had important meanings – moral, political, historical, philosophical – that surpassed it *qua* judicial case. It raised, for example, crucial “general questions,” such as: how could the catastrophe of the Holocaust happen? Arendt, however, insisted that its extrajudicial meanings were irrelevant to the trial, and must not become a part of it. Its one and only legitimate goal was to render justice. “I held and hold the opinion,” she declared, “that this trial had to take place in the interests of justice and nothing else.” At the same time, Arendt, as we saw, understood *Eichmann's* subtitle literally – believing that it *was* a “report” on Eichmann's trial. Reflecting on the trial and on her “report,” she wrote:

... the question of individual guilt or innocence, the act of meting out justice to both the defendant and the victim, are the only things at stake in a criminal court. The Eichmann trial was no exception ... . The present report deals with nothing but the extent to which the court in Jerusalem succeeded in fulfilling the demands of justice.<sup>50</sup>

These were the concluding words of the “Postscript” to *Eichmann's* 1965 edition – its final, definitive one. Thus, the book's last word was “justice.” But, as we saw, Arendt's “report” was highly idiosyncratic. It strayed vigorously towards Eichmann's mind. Indeed, by doing so, it came to resemble an examination of a psychiatrist, aimed at diagnosing a mental patient.<sup>51</sup> Justice and law, however, do not concern themselves with the *precise* workings of a criminal mind



– such as the operation of the perspectivism of its thinking. Conversely, criminal law – the law that deals with criminal activities like Eichmann’s – does concern itself with intent and with motive.

Indeed, the concepts of “intent” and of “motive” occupy a very important position in criminal law. The latter assumes that criminal actions – crimes – have a subjective dimension – consisting of the thinking and the emotions that accompany them. Criminal law terms this subjectivity “*mens rea*,” literally, “guilty mind,” and considers intent and motive to be central elements of that mind. It understands intent to be the purposefulness of criminal actions; it sees motive as the subjective drive that inspires such actions. If, for example, a person deliberately kills his neighbour out of revenge because the latter has keyed his new sports car, the murder’s purposefulness is its intent; its motive is revenge. Criminal law, moreover, conceptualises intent as a main determinant of the criminality of criminal actions – of that criminality’s character and magnitude. In the case of homicide, for instance, intent – its presence or absence – defines the crime’s nature: a purposeful homicide is categorised as “murder,” an unintentional one as the less serious crime of “involuntary manslaughter.” In contrast, criminal law regards motive as much less important than intent. As a general principle, it considers motive to be “irrelevant” to the criminality of crimes. For example, if a person steals her neighbour’s new sports car, the law judges her action to be a theft, regardless of her motive – whether it be hatred of her neighbour, or the desire to save her ill husband’s life by driving him to a hospital with the car. Nevertheless, criminal law takes motive into consideration in determining the character and the magnitude of the criminality of crimes – thereby allowing motive to play a role in itself. It will, thus, take the car thief’s motive into account when assessing the criminality of her actions. If she is motivated by the noble impulse to save her partner’s life, it may impose on her a lenient sentence. Thus, the concepts of intent and of motive assume a central role in criminal law – it employs them as key conceptual tools in assessing the criminality of criminal actions.<sup>52</sup>

Arendt was well aware of the centrality of intent in criminal law. Discussing the success of Eichmann’s trial in rendering justice, she writes:

Foremost among the ... issues at stake in the ... trial was the assumption current in all modern legal systems that intent to do wrong is necessary for the commission of a crime. On nothing, perhaps, has civilized jurisprudence prided itself more than on this taking into account of the subjective factor.

Arendt, moreover, thought that motive is also linked closely to criminal actions. In her view, as we saw, a crucial aspect of what she called “the banality of evil” was the fact that, in his activities as a main perpetrator of the Holocaust, Eichmann was not driven by evil motives. For Arendt, this vacuity of motive was one of his most shocking traits. In other words: she expected to find in the Nazi

a motive for his perpetration of genocide; she supposed that, like intent, motive too is a source of crime. Arendt thus assumed, like criminal law, that motive and intent constitute important criteria – critical conceptual instruments – for assessing the criminality of crimes.<sup>53</sup>

Arendt believed firmly that justice was what the Eichmann trial was all about. But, by moving towards a dissection of its subject's mind, *Eichmann* strayed away from – overlooking – law and justice. Explaining the meaning of the phenomenon of “the banality of evil,” Arendt makes an observation of crucial significance for her “report.” Having stressed that Eichmann did not have evil motives for his crimes, she states: “Except for *an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement*, he had no motives at all [italics mine].”<sup>54</sup> This statement is momentous. It claims, without Arendt's realising its moment, that Eichmann's only motive – the one and only motive that he ever had, in Jerusalem, and throughout his life – was his careerism – his drive to success. Precisely that bourgeois drive – his being bourgeois – could well be a criminal motive that transformed him into a chief perpetrator of the Holocaust. Arendt does not see that. And her failure of understanding is perplexing. She does not question the innocence of Eichmann's careerism. She claims that her book tries to assess the realisation of justice in Jerusalem. But she fails to realise that, if his drive to success was, as she states, the main motive of Eichmann's life, law and justice – and her own assumptions on the role of intent and of motive in them – demand a reflection on the implication, in his crimes, of Eichmann's being bourgeois.

### Concluding Reflections: Being Bourgeois, Nazism and Capitalism

*Eichmann* bourgeoisified Eichmann. Surreptitiously and unintentionally, it represented him as being bourgeois. This essay brings out this representation. Scattered throughout Arendt's book, it constitutes an inadvertent subtext that contends with the book's main ostensible argument.

Contra that argument, *Eichmann's* unwitting subtext does not depict Eichmann as a bureaucrat with a mental defect that led him to become a chief executor of the Holocaust. It represents him, rather, as a dedicated bureaucrat completing a genocidal job assignment – motivated, in doing so, by a bourgeois drive to success. *Eichmann's* subtextual narrative shows that Eichmann's defining characteristic was not a monoperspectival thinking, but being bourgeois. Moreover, it indicates that his being bourgeois transformed Eichmann into a principal executor of the Holocaust. His being bourgeois converted him into a follower of Hitler, and compelled him to enter the SS; in Vienna, it probably motivated his “work” as an organiser of the expulsion of Austria's Jews; in Hungary, it forced him to devote himself single-mindedly to his murderous duties, and, opposing the orders of Himmler, to carry the Holocaust on. Even

more, Eichmann's sole motive, ever, was, in the form of careerism, his bourgeois drive to success – again, his being bourgeois. And this being bourgeois may well be the motive for Eichmann's crimes. By describing the Nazi in these ways, *Eichmann's* surreptitious and inadvertent subtext challenges the book's main argument that Eichmann's foremost feature was a monoperspectival mind that turned him into a chief perpetrator of the Holocaust. It proposes, instead, that Eichmann's primary trait was being bourgeois – which transformed him into that egregious criminal.<sup>55</sup>

But while bourgeoisifying Eichmann, Arendt failed to understand adequately his being bourgeois, and to see it as criminal. Instead, she concentrated on the defective operation of his mind, and thought that his crimes were its issue. Arendt's idiosyncratic focus on Eichmann's mind had a special source. In the introduction to her last work, *The Life of the Mind*, she recalled that that treatise originated in Jerusalem. "The immediate impulse" that gave birth to it, she noted, "came from [her] attending the Eichmann trial." There, her "interest" was "awakened" by what she saw as Eichmann's most striking feature – his "thoughtlessness" – the blatant "absence of thinking" that, in *Eichmann*, she conceptualised as the Nazi bureaucrat's incapacity to think from the perspective of another human being. Struck by Eichmann's mental defect, Arendt asked herself:

Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually "condition" them against it?

This question, Arendt explained, "first" inspired in her a "preoccupation with mental activities." The eventual product of that fascination would be *The Life of the Mind*.<sup>56</sup> Thus, Eichmann's trial occasioned, for Arendt, a novel intellectual interest in the human mind. Discovered in Jerusalem, that interest thenceforth became a central concern in her work. Indeed, it came to dominate that work in the last years of her life – ultimately coming to fruition in *Life*. But, as this essay indicates, *Eichmann* shows that this newfound interest became excessively intense in Arendt's reportage of the Eichmann trial. In *Eichmann*, it drove her to focus too single-mindedly on Eichmann's mind – and to neglect "the demands of justice."<sup>57</sup>

*Eichmann's* idiosyncratic focus and its source are filled with meaning. Discovered in Jerusalem, as we just saw, Arendt's philosophical interest in "the life of the mind" was what skewed her book towards Eichmann's mind, and away from his being bourgeois, becoming a barrier to an adequate understanding of the latter. In other words, what distorted *Eichmann* was a new professional interest on Arendt's part in the human mind – a new objective in her intellectual career. What warped her book was, in this sense, careerism. Careerism is, thus,

the origin of *Eichmann's* strange focus, and a source of its surprising disregard of Eichmann's being bourgeois. In showing it, Arendt appears, in a profound irony, similar to the object of her reportage. Like Eichmann, she too emerges as intensely concentrated on her new career objective – as single-mindedly focused on her career. She too becomes dominated by careerism. And, as in Eichmann's case, careerism has tragic consequences for her as well – it seriously damages her *Eichmann*.<sup>58</sup>

Through its cunning subtext, *Eichmann* also exhibits a momentous historiographical meaning. Its unintended subtextual narrative connects the history of Nazism to that of the system of socio-economic organisation that historians call “capitalism.” As this essay has argued, Arendt shows in her book that, as embodied in Eichmann, being bourgeois was implicated in the Holocaust. Thus, *Eichmann* implies that Max Horkheimer may be right, after all, when he suggested that understanding the history of Nazism demands relating it to that of capitalism. Inadvertently, Arendt suggests, with Horkheimer, that Nazism was a child of capitalism.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Max Horkheimer, “The Jews and Europe,” in Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner, eds., *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 77–94.

<sup>2</sup> For the history of the Frankfurt School, see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923 – 1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) – the classic history of the School, originally published in 1973; David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance*, trans., Michael Robertson (Cambridge: Polity, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Horkheimer, 78.

<sup>4</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1994), 460.

<sup>5</sup> Hannah Arendt, “Social Science Techniques and the Study of Concentration Camps,” *Jewish Social Studies* 12:1 (January 1950): 49–50.

<sup>6</sup> Arendt, *Origins*, 305–326, 460–479.

<sup>7</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1967), 49, 276, 280, 287–288.

<sup>8</sup> For analyses of the controversies, see Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*:

*For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 328-378; Richard I. Cohen, "A Generation's Response to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*," in Steven E. Aschheim, ed., *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 253-277; Anson Rabinbach, "Eichmann in New York: The New York Intellectuals and the Hannah Arendt Controversy," *October* 108 (Spring 2004): 97-111.

<sup>9</sup> See Gershom Scholem, "Letter to Hannah Arendt of June 23, 1963," in Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arendt, "'Eichmann in Jerusalem': An Exchange of Letters between Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arendt," *Encounter* (January 1964): pp. 51-53; Dagme Barnouw, "The Secularity of Evil: Hannah Arendt and the Eichmann Controversy," *Modern Judaism* 3:1 (February 1983): 75-94; José Brunner, "Eichmann, Arendt and Freud in Jerusalem: On the Evils of Narcissism and the Pleasures of Thoughtlessness," *History and Memory* 8:2 (Fall – Winter 1996): 61-88; Richard J. Bernstein, "'The Banality of Evil' Reconsidered," in Craig Calhoun and John McGowan, eds., *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 297-322; Richard J. Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 205-224; Barry Sharpe, *Modesty and Arrogance in Judgment: Hannah Arendt's Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Westport: Praeger, 1999); Dana R. Villa, "Conscience, the Banality of Evil, and the Idea of a Representative Perpetrator," in Dana R. Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 39-60; Susan Neiman, "Theodicy in Jerusalem," in Steven E. Aschheim, ed., *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 65-90; Devin O. Pendas, "Eichmann in Jerusalem, Arendt in Frankfurt: The Eichmann Trial, the Auschwitz Trial, and the Banality of Justice," *New German Critique* 34:1 (Winter 2007): 77-109; Michael Mack, "The Holocaust and Hannah Arendt's Philosophical Critique of Philosophy: *Eichmann in Jerusalem*," *New German Critique* 36:1 (Winter 2009): 35-60; Peter Baehr, "Banality and Cleverness: *Eichmann in Jerusalem* Revisited," in Roger Berkowitz, Jeffrey Katz, and Thomas Keenan, eds., *Thinking in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 139-142.

<sup>10</sup> See Lionel Abel, "The Aesthetics of Evil: Hannah Arendt on Eichmann and the Jews," *Partisan Review* 30:2 (Summer 1963): 211-230; Norman Podhoretz, "Hannah Arendt on Eichmann: A Study in the Perversity of Brilliance," *Commentary* 36:3 (September 1963): 201-208; Marie Syrkin, "Hannah Arendt: The Clothes of the Empress," *Dissent* 10:4 (September 1963): 344-352; Gertrude Ezorsky, "Hannah Arendt Against the Facts," *New Politics* 2:4 (Fall 1963): 52-73; Jacob Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight: The Eichmann Trial, the Jewish Catastrophe, and Hannah Arendt's Narrative* (New York: Macmillan, 1965); Yaacov Lozowick, "Malicious Clerks: The Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil," in Steven E. Aschheim, ed., *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 214-223; David Cesarani, *Becoming*

*Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes, and Trial of a "Desk Murderer"* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2006); Deborah Lipstadt, *The Eichmann Trial* (New York: Schocken, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> This essay is based on the assumption that Marxism identifies the bourgeoisie with capitalism. Marxist thought does so – characteristically and famously. The idea that the bourgeoisie is the agent – the creator – of capitalism is a classic tenet of Marxism. It is a central argument in one of Marxism's best-known works – Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed., David McLellan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Hannah Arendt, "Martin Heidegger at Eighty," in Michael Murray, ed., *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 298.

<sup>13</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann*, 287.

<sup>14</sup> Hannah Arendt, "Letter to Mary McCarthy of September 20, 1963," in Carol Brightman, ed., *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy, 1949 – 1975* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995), 148.

<sup>15</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann*, 49, 276, 280, 287–288.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–51, 276, 287–288.

<sup>17</sup> When analysing his thinking, Arendt argued that Eichmann exhibited a specific mental inability – an inability to think from the point of view of another individual. *Ibid.*, 47–51, 276, 280, 287–288. In *The Life of the Mind*, her last work, Arendt conceptualised human thinking as an inner – mental – dialogue in which one talks to oneself. The experience of one's talking to oneself, in one's mind, is thinking. When claiming, in *Eichmann*, that Eichmann was unable to think, Arendt did not mean that he could not create the dialogue of thinking that she theorised in *Life*. She had in mind an inability to adopt, mentally, the point of view of other people. She thought that Eichmann showed a monoperspectival thinking. In her work after *Eichmann*, Arendt suggested that the opposite of this defective thinking – a perspectival thinking from the viewpoints of others – plays a vital role in the operation of the mental faculty of judgment. Originally, Arendt planned *The Life of the Mind* to have three parts – on what she conceived to be the three "activities" of the human mind: thinking, willing, and judging. Unfortunately, she passed away before completing the treatise's last part – on judging – leaving it unfinished. Arendt had, however, analysed the mental faculty of judgment in several of her writings. These analyses show that she thought that the ability to think from the perspective of other individuals plays a critical role in the operation of human judgment. This is the kind of thinking that she suggested that Eichmann lacked. In other words, the mental defect that she observed in Eichmann was an inability to think perspectivally – which debilitated his judgment. When writing *Eichmann*, Arendt had not developed yet the conception of judgment that she formulated in her later work. At that time, she

only observed that Eichmann exhibited a monoperspectival thinking that prevented him from understanding that he was perpetrating egregious crimes. For analyses of Arendt's conception of judgment, see Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, "Reflections on Hannah Arendt's *The Life of the Mind*," *Political Theory* 10:2 (May 1982): 277-305; Ronald Beiner, "Interpretive Essay: Hannah Arendt on Judging," in Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed., Ronald Beiner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 89-156; Richard J. Bernstein, "Judging – the Actor and the Spectator," in Richard J. Bernstein, *Philosophical Profiles: Essays in a Pragmatic Mode* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 221-237; Maurizio Passerin D'Entrèves, "Arendt's Theory of Judgment," in Dana Villa, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 245-260. For an examination of Arendt's views on thinking and on judging, and of their relationship to her analysis of Eichmann, see Milen Jissov, "(Mis-)Understanding Anti-Semitism and Jewish Identity: From Bernard Lazare to Hannah Arendt" (PhD diss., Queen's University, 2009), 292-309, 346-358.

<sup>18</sup> This part of the essay extracts and reconstructs *Eichmann's* Marxist subtext *as that narrative is articulated* in the book. It neither accepts, nor rejects, nor seeks to assess the historical validity of, that subtext. To avoid stylistic redundancy, I have minimised the use of expressions indicating that the ideas of *Eichmann's* subtextual narrative are Arendt's.

<sup>19</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann*, 21-35.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-126, 159, 295.

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, trans., C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 118-123.

<sup>23</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann*, 125-126, 159, 294-295.

<sup>24</sup> Arendt, *Origins*, 313.

<sup>25</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann*, 126.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 126, 149. Historically, Hitler's popular support had numerous and complex sources and causes. In *Eichmann*, as we just saw, Arendt argued that Eichmann and bourgeois society embraced Hitler because they perceived him as an embodiment of success. This essay does not try to assess the historical adequacy or validity of this argument; such an assessment is beyond its scope. What is important for its purpose is that Arendt made the argument.

<sup>27</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann*, 31, 33.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-46.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 36, 43-44, 65-72, 151-153.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-141, 194-202.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-144.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-150, 194-205.



<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Arendt, *Origins*, 305-340.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>36</sup> Arendt called the loyal Nazi a “mass man” – conceiving him as male.

<sup>37</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann*, 135-150, 194-205.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 54, 59-65, 79-82.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44, 47-48, 56-67.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 62, 81-82.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 28, 47-51, 287-288.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* My use of the language of theatre here is deliberate. Arendt explicitly compared Eichmann’s trial to a play. She states: “A trial resembles a play in that both begin and end with the doer, not with the victim. ... In the center of a trial can only be the one who did [*sic*] – in this respect, he is like the hero in the play.” Arendt elaborated the comparison by arguing that Eichmann’s behaviour during his police interrogation was a macabre “comedy” and that the absurdity of his conduct, in recounting his story of disappointment in his SS career, constituted a part of that “comedy.” *Ibid.*, 9, 28, 47-51, 287-288. Thus, when Eichmann verbalised his story of career failure, he resembled, from Arendt’s own perspective, an actor in a macabre play. He performed an act of absurdity.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 28, 47-51, 287-288.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 285-287, 298.

<sup>51</sup> *Eichmann* portrayed Eichmann as exhibiting multiple mental defects. Besides his flawed memory, monoperspectival thinking, and fixation on careerism, he also showed a tendency to speak in clichéd language. For Arendt, this affliction was related to his main trait – his mind’s monoperspectivism. Arendt, *Eichmann*, 47-49. For an analysis of Arendt’s understanding of Eichmann’s linguistic deficiency, see Jakob Norberg, “The Political Theory of the Cliché: Hannah Arendt Reading Adolf Eichmann,” *Cultural Critique* 76 (Fall 2010): 74-97.

<sup>52</sup> My discussion of the role of intent and of motive in criminal law is based on the following work: Glanville Williams, *Textbook of Criminal Law*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. ed. (London: Stevens & Sons, 1983); Richard Card, *Card, Cross and Jones: Criminal Law*, 14<sup>th</sup>. ed. (London: Butterworths, 1998); Antony Duff, ed., *Philosophy and the Criminal Law: Principle and Critique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

1998); Alan Norrie, *Crime, Reason and History: A Critical Introduction to Criminal Law* (London: Butterworths, 2001); Guyora Binder, "The Rhetoric of Motive and Intent," *Buffalo Criminal Law Review* 6:1 (April 2002): 1-96; William Wilson, *Central Issues in Criminal Theory* (Oxford: Hart, 2002); Antonio Cassese, ed., *The Oxford Companion to International Criminal Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); R. A. Duff and Stuart P. Green, eds., *Philosophical Foundations of Criminal Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>53</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann*, 47-51, 276-277, 280, 287-288. In *Eichmann*, Arendt did not analyse or define rigorously – nor distinguish precisely between – the legal concepts of "intent" and of "motive."

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>55</sup> This essay's argument that Arendt represented Eichmann as being bourgeois and implicated that mode of being in his crimes aligns with Christopher Browning's well-known study of the perpetrators of the Holocaust, *Ordinary Men*. Analysing the activities of a German police battalion that executed brutally thousands of Jews during the Final Solution, Browning concluded that an annihilationist anti-Semitism was not the main driving force behind the policemen's crimes. Rather, that driving force was conformism – conformism to the activities of the police unit. For Browning, careerism – the drive to perform well one's assigned murderous duties in order to advance in one's career in the police – also constituted an important motivating force in the genocidal deeds of the mass murderers. Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993).

<sup>56</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Thinking*, vol., 1, ed., Mary McCarthy (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 3-6.

<sup>57</sup> Seyla Benhabib supports the view that Arendt became prepossessed with the "life of the mind" at the time of writing *Eichmann* and that this intellectual fascination damaged her book. The "deep perplexities of ... philosophy about thinking, judging and moral action," Benhabib has argued, "were what really preoccupied Arendt in her attempt to analyze Eichmann's actions." According to Benhabib, her prepossession with these philosophical problems prevented Arendt from conceptualising adequately the ill-conceived concept of "the banality of evil." Seyla Benhabib, "Identity, Perspective and Narrative in Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*," *History and Memory* 8:2 (Fall – Winter 1996): 44-48. For another statement of these views, see also Seyla Benhabib, "Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*," in Dana Villa, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 73-76.

<sup>58</sup> In noting this similarity between Eichmann and Arendt, I do *not* claim that Arendt was a Nazi. Careerism and Nazism are different things, and showing

careerism in one's work does not automatically make one a Nazi. Here, I argue that, like Eichmann, Arendt exhibited careerism. And that her careerism – her intellectual absorption in the “life of the mind” – thwarted her attempt to understand Eichmann's trial judiciously.

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